

Forum News Release

WESTERN ASSOCIATION OF FISH & WILDLIFE AGENCIES

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Key recommended strategies and priorities for the range-wide conservation of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats were released today in a report provided to the Western Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies (WAFWA). The report reflects the collaborative work of the Greater Sage-Grouse Range-Wide Issues Forum (Forum), sponsored by WAFWA and convened by the U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution, Tucson, Arizona (Institute).

The Forum Report identifies seven priority goals for the conservation of greater sage-grouse, including creation of long-term shared leadership and commitment for strategy implementation, identification and protection of existing high quality sagebrush habitat, and stabilization of sagebrush habitats in decline. Other priority goals relate to database enhancement and information-sharing, research and monitoring, and properly managed livestock grazing.

Forum participants identified funding, leadership to support a long-term effort and an appropriate organizational structure to sustain the effort as critical to the success of the greater sage-grouse conservation strategy.

While there was considerable agreement among Forum participants about core values, preliminary strategies and critical, priority actions, the Forum Report acknowledges the presence of unresolved concerns at the conclusion of this process. Most prominent among these concerns are those related to livestock grazing and energy development, as well as concerns regarding implementation of regulatory mechanisms.

The Forum was convened in November 2005 to facilitate the collaborative development of approaches to address issues, needs, opportunities and partnerships related to the conservation of greater sage-grouse and sagebrush habitats at the range-wide scale. Thirty-five people representing a broad array of perspectives related to greater sage-grouse conservation participated in the Forum process. Forum participants were chosen based on their experience, background and knowledge of greater sage-grouse conservation issues, and their ability to work collaboratively and constructively on development of strategies to address range-wide issues.

The Forum Report, its attachments, and other products and processes related to the Forum are available for viewing and downloading at the Forum website: <http://sagegrouse.ecr.gov>. Results documented in the Forum Report and its attachments will be integrated with other local, state/provincial, tribal and agency conservation strategies into the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy (Strategy).

WAFWA is comprised of fish and wildlife agency directors from the western United States and Canada. The U.S. Institute for Environmental Conflict Resolution is a federal program established in 1998 by the U.S. Congress to assist parties in resolving environmental, natural resource and public land conflicts. It is a program of the Tucson-based Morris K. Udall Foundation, an independent agency of the executive branch.

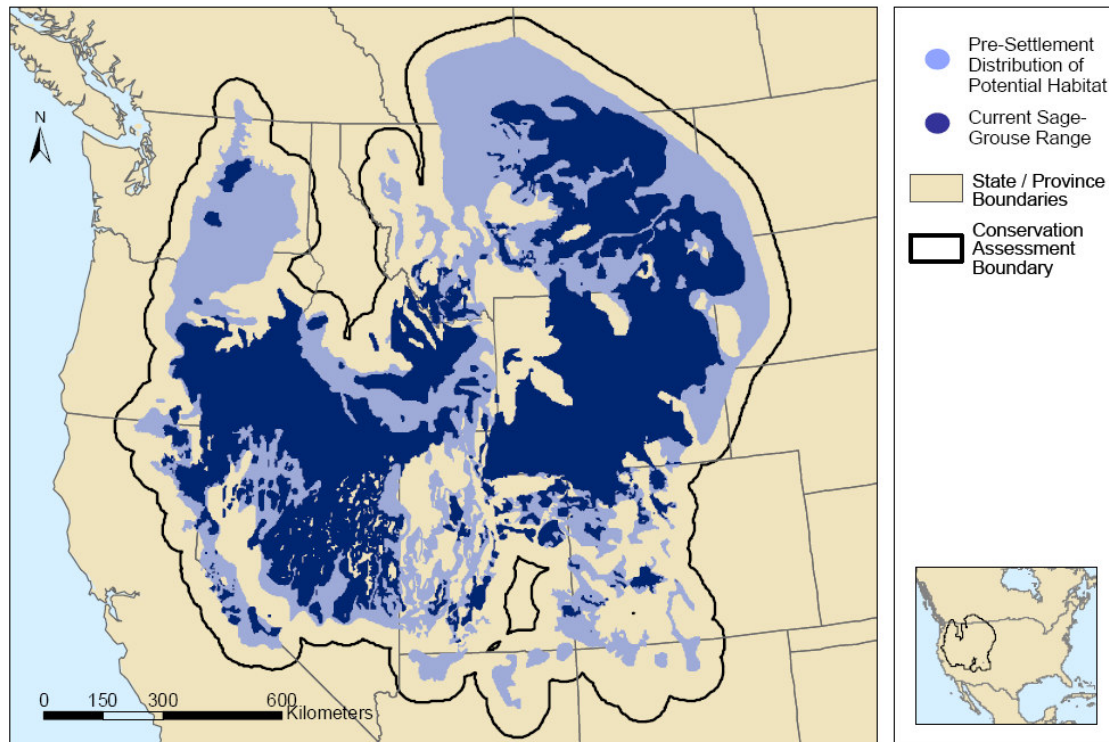
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Frequently Asked Questions

What does a Greater Sage-grouse look like and where do they live?



Male Greater Sage-grouse displaying during spring breeding season.
Photo by James Yule



Historic and current distribution of sage-grouse. (Schroeder et al., 2004)

What is the relationship between sage-grouse and sagebrush?

Sage-grouse are what is termed a sagebrush dependent species. They are dependent on sagebrush to provide food, shelter and security. Sage-grouse cannot exist without sagebrush. Sage-grouse are classified by biologists as a “landscape species” because they require year around access to relatively large tracts of good quality sagebrush habitat.

Are all sage-grouse alike?

There are two species of sage-grouse: the greater sage-grouse and the Gunnison sage-grouse. The Gunnison sage-grouse is currently found only Colorado and Utah, having disappeared from New Mexico during the last 50 years. The greater sage-grouse currently inhabits 11 western states (Washington, Oregon, California, Idaho, Nevada, Montana, Wyoming, Utah, North Dakota, South Dakota, and Colorado) and two Canadian provinces (Alberta and Saskatchewan). Both species of sage-grouse have experienced declines in population and distribution during recent years. A conservation plan for Gunnison sage-grouse was released in 2005. The Strategy is being written for the greater sage-grouse.

What is the relationship of the Greater Sage-grouse Forum to the Strategy?

The Forum is a very important source of information that will be used to develop the Conservation Sub-strategy chapter of the Greater Sage-grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy. The Forum process brought together a diverse group of stakeholders to specifically examine range-wide sage-grouse conservation issues. Range-wide issues are those that are beyond the scope of issues addressed by Local Working Group and State sage-grouse conservation plans. Over 50 Local Working Groups have examined local sage grouse and sagebrush conservation issues and needs and have drafted, or are in the process of drafting, local conservation plans. States have considered sage grouse conservation needs from their respective statewide perspectives and prepared state-level plans. The Forum examines conservation issues, opportunities and needs that exist on a range-wide basis, which includes population and subpopulation considerations because many range across Local Working Group and state boundaries.

Who participated in the Forum?

Forum participants were selected by the Institute as representative of the broad array of stakeholders concerned with sagebrush and sage-grouse conservation. Stakeholder invited to participate include: Congressional Reps./Staff, Federal agencies, Industries, Local government, Local Working Group Members , National Conservation Organizations, Sage Grouse Listing Petitioner, State Government, USFWS, Utilities, WAFWA, Sage Grouse Biologists, National Professional Wildlife Organizations, Tribal Governments, Non-affiliated Sage Grouse Experts, Rangeland and Population Ecologists. A total of 35 individuals participated as members of the Forum.

The Greater Sage Grouse Comprehensive Conservation Strategy will consist of seven sub-strategies and supporting materials as illustrated below:

Maintain & enhance sage-grouse & their habitats

